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PATENT APPLICATION
USSN 09/470,582



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**IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
ON APPEAL FROM THE EXAMINER TO THE BOARD
OF PATENT APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES**

In re Application of: SOLOMON, et al.
Serial No.: 09/470,582
Filing Date: December 22, 1999
Confirmation No. 6338
Group Art Unit: 3622
Examiner: James W. Myhre
Title: REBATE PROCESSING SYSTEM AND METHOD
PROVIDING PROMOTIONS DATABASE AND
INTERFACE

Mail Stop Appeal Brief - Patents
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
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Dear Sir:

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Appeal Brief

Appellants have appealed to this Board from the decision of the Examiner, contained in a final Office Action mailed February 12, 2004 (the "Final Office Action"), finally rejecting Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-32, 34-38, and 40-46. Appellants mailed a Notice of Appeal on May 11, 2004. Appellants respectfully submit this Appeal Brief, in triplicate under 37 C.F.R. § 1.17(c).

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Willie Jiles
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Date of Deposit: July 12, 2004

REAL PARTY IN INTEREST

The real party in interest for this Application under appeal is Parago, Inc. as shown by assignment recorded under Reel/Frame 011091/0558 on September 12, 2000.

RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

There are no other appeals or interferences known to the Appellants, the undersigned Attorney for Appellants, or the Assignee that will directly affect or be directly affected by or have a bearing on the Board's decision in the pending appeal.

STATUS OF CLAIMS

Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-32, 34-38, and 40-46 were rejected in the final Office Action mailed February 12, 2004. Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-32, 34-38, and 40-46 are all presented for appeal and are set forth in the Appendix.

STATUS OF AMENDMENTS

After the Final Office Action, Appellants filed an amendment to fix a typographical error regarding the dependency of Claim 34, which depended from previously canceled Claim 33 prior to the amendment. Appellants present Claim 34 in amended form in the attached Appendix.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

Traditional rebates offer cash back to customers who fulfill a set of requirements after purchasing a product. *Specification*, at page 2, lines 2-18. For example, after purchasing a computer bearing a rebate, the purchaser may submit physical documentation to receive cash back from the computer manufacturer. These post-purchase requirements give rebate programs an advantage over other types of product discounts, such as coupons. For example, since coupon discounts apply at product purchase, the customer pays a reduced price at the purchase. With a rebate, the customer pays full price and then must perform tasks to receive the rebate. If the customer fails to appropriately perform the tasks, the rebate is never paid. Therefore, a rebate can generate a sale without ever being redeemed, whereas a coupon that generates a sale is inherently used to discount the purchase price.

The present invention encompasses a number of embodiments for automating, consolidating, and streamlining rebate processes, while maintaining key aspects of rebate programs that provide enhanced value. *Id.*, at page 3, lines 2-11. A rebate processing center provides a unified system for managing information relating to rebate promotions, processing rebate requests, and interfacing with rebate sponsors and consumers. *Id.*, at page 8, line 21 - page 9, line 8.

The information managed by the rebate processing center can include rebate promotion data and transaction information relating to product purchases. *Id.*, at page 10, lines 9-23. The rebate promotion data details information relating to rebate offers, such as sponsor information, product information, rebate requirements, disbursement options, and statistical information. *Id.*, at Fig. 3 and page 10, line 31 - page 13, line 14. For example, data for a particular rebate promotion may indicate the promotion sponsor, a product identifier, documentation required to receive the rebate, valid purchase dates for the promotion, various options for receiving the rebate, and statistics for the promotion. *Id.* The transaction information details purchases of products by consumers and tracks consumer activities to fulfill rebate requirements. *Id.*, at Fig. 4. and page 13, line 15 - page 16, line 18. For example, the transaction information may include an entry identifying a consumer, a product, a promotion, and purchase information. *Id.* To process rebates, the rebate processing center associates the promotion and transaction information to identify consumers who have satisfied rebate requirements.

The rebate processing center may also enable interaction with promotion sponsors and with consumers. *Id.*, at Figs. 5-10. Particular embodiments of the processing center provide promotion status reports to promotion sponsors. *Id.*, at Fig. 10. A promotion report may detail statistical information such as a breakage rate, which attempts to track the rate at which products bearing a rebate are sold, but the rebate is not successfully claimed. *Id.* The breakage rate can be key information for a sponsor, since this rate may influence pricing decisions on future promotions.

In addition to the promotion reports, the rebate processing center may provide status updates to consumers. *Id.*, at page 14, lines 16-27. For example, using contact information, such as an email address provided by a consumer, the rebate processing center can provide status updates at appropriate times. This and other user interfacing aspects can enhance the

consumer's satisfaction with the rebate process, even though the system as a whole maintains the potential for breakage.

According to particular embodiments, the rebate processing center enables consumers to select between various disbursement options for receiving an authorized rebate. *Id.*, at page 12, lines 12-23 and Fig. 9. For example, the disbursement options for a rebate may include \$5.00 cash back or a \$15.00 purchase credit. By providing options with different cash values to the recipient, the rebate processing center can incent consumers to choose options other than cash. This can, in turn, drive increased sales while maintaining consumer satisfaction.

ISSUE

Whether Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-32, 34-38, and 40-46 are patentable under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 6,039,244 issued to Finsterwald ("*Finsterwald*") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,450,407 issued to Freeman, et al. ("*Freeman*").

GROUPING OF CLAIMS

Pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 1.192(c)(7), Appellants request that the following claims be grouped together for purposes of this appeal:

Group 1: Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-31, and 40-46; and

Group 2: Claims 32 and 34-38.

ARGUMENT

The Examiner rejects Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-32, 34-38, and 40-46 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,039,244 to Finsterwald ("*Finsterwald*") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,450,407 to Freeman, et al. ("*Freeman*"). Appellants respectfully traverse the rejection.

For this rejection, Appellants request that Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-31, and 40-46 be considered separately from Claims 32 and 34-38 due to patentable distinctions between these claims. Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-31, and 40-46 generally address systems, methods, and apparatus for rebate processing, while Claims 32 and 34-38 generally address a

computer-based interface for facilitating rebate processing. Not only are the claims in Group 2 patentably distinct, but, as will be addressed below, the Examiner has completely failed to address the limitations of Claims 32 and 34-38.

Group 1

For at least two reasons, Appellants submit that the art cited by the Examiner fails to support the rejection of Appellants' claims under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a). First, the *Finsterwald-Freeman* combination fails to teach or suggest all elements of Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-31, and 40-46. Second, the combination of *Finsterwald* and *Freeman* is improper.

A. The Finsterwald-Freeman Combination Fails To Teach Or Suggest All Elements of Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-31, and 40-46.

Consider Appellants' Claim 8, which recites:

8. An apparatus for rebate processing, comprising:
 - a first memory operable to store promotion information describing a plurality of promotions, the promotion information comprising, for each of the promotions, a promotion sponsor identifier, a promotion identifier, promotion requirements, and at least one disbursement option;
 - a second memory operable to store transaction information indicating a plurality of product purchases, the transaction information comprising, for each of the purchases, a consumer identifier, a rebate request status, and a promotion identifier matching to a selected one of the promotions; and
 - a processor operable to process rebate requests by associating the product purchases with the promotions using the promotion identifiers and determining whether selected transaction information for the purchases satisfies the rebate requirements for the promotions, the processor further operable to provide rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses and to generate promotion reports, a promotion report comprising selected promotion information for at least one of the promotions having a particular promotion sponsor identifier.

Finsterwald and *Freeman*, taken alone or in combination, fail to teach or suggest all elements of this claim. For example, Claim 8 includes:

a processor operable to process rebate requests by associating the purchases with the promotions using the promotion identifiers and determining whether selected transaction information for the purchases satisfies the rebate requirements for the promotions, the processor further operable to provide rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses and to

generate promotion reports, a promotion report comprising selected promotion information for at least one of the promotions having a particular promotion sponsor identifier.

None of the cited references teach or suggest this element and its operation.

In general, *Finsterwald* teaches specific techniques for enabling rebate or coupon systems. More specifically, *Finsterwald* teaches a system that generates unique codes and then distributes these codes to consumers purchasing particular products. See, e.g., *Finsterwald*, at column 1, lines 41-65. For example, one of the unique codes may be printed on the internal packaging of a product. A consumer, having received a unique code at purchase, can then submit the code to receive “points” that may later be redeemed for other products or services. *Finsterwald*, at column 2, lines 19-33. The *Finsterwald* system may store these points in an account created for the consumer. *Finsterwald*, at column 9, lines 16-25. After a code has been redeemed, that code is then canceled. *Finsterwald*, at column 9, lines 57-61. This prevents subsequent attempts to redeem the identical code. Thus the unique codes of the *Finsterwald* system add security, since the system knows all valid codes and permits redemption of each code only once. *Finsterwald*, at column 2, lines 46-61 and column 9, lines 57-61.

No Teaching of Rebate Status Updates

In rejecting the claims, the Examiner addresses selected claimed aspects by reference to the point account of *Finsterwald*. Consider the processor element of Appellants’ Claim 8, which is “operable to provide rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses.” As teaching for this aspect, the Examiner cites to column 10, lines 21-25 of *Finsterwald*. This portion of *Finsterwald* explains that a consumer can access his “point account” to determine how many points have been accumulated. However, *Finsterwald*’s disclosure of a point account balance simply does not teach the claim requirements. Claim 8 requires a memory that maintains a rebate request status for each of multiple purchases. Claim 8 further requires a processor “operable to provide rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses.” *Finsterwald*’s ability to inform a consumer of the number of points in an account does not teach or suggest providing rebate status updates using rebates statuses each associated with a particular purchase.

Also, *Finsterwald* not only fails to teach or suggest the claimed status aspects, but rather teaches away from these aspects. In *Finsterwald*, the disclosed rebate operations are instantaneous in nature. That is, when a consumer submits a valid code, points are instantaneously credited to the consumer's account. *Finsterwald*, at column 9, lines 41-44. In contrast, Appellants' system can provide detailed information regarding rebate status of rebate requests in various stages of processing. For example, consider the description at page 14, lines 17-24 of the Appellants' specification, which states:

Rebate status provides an indication of the current state of a rebate request from consumer 22, for example, transaction initiated, awaiting rebate request form 24, processing information, awaiting verification, rebate request form 24 invalid, request denied, request approved, awaiting disbursement option 66 selection, fulfilling disbursement option 66, processing complete, or any other suitable status designation.

The instantaneous nature of *Finsterwald's* rebate operations teach away from any such operation. *Finsterwald* teaches that points are credited immediately to a consumer's point account upon receiving a valid code. Thus *Finsterwald* does not disclose any rebate request transaction that remains pending such that status updates would be appropriate. Moreover, the instantaneous nature of the *Finsterwald* system teaches away from maintaining rebate request status on a purchase by purchase basis.

***The Examiner's Response Highlights
the Deficiencies of Finsterwald***

In the Final Office Action, the Examiner maintains his earlier rejection and provides a response to the preceding arguments. In this response, the Examiner specifically addresses Appellants' arguments regarding the rebate status capabilities required in the claims. For these capabilities, the Examiner again cites to the point accounts, but also cites to the database of unique codes maintained by the *Finsterwald* system. As earlier discussed, a point account simply indicates how many rebate points have been accumulated by a user. The unique codes provide a security mechanism whereby the *Finsterwald* system can verify valid requests. Prior to use, a code is not associated with any particular account. After use, a code is canceled and remains not associated with any particular account. *Finsterwald*, at column

9, lines 57-61. *Finsterwald* details no link between the codes and particular point accounts. However, the Examiner links these two aspects of *Finsterwald*, stating:

Since this information [unique codes] is stored in the same system which maintains the customer's account status information [point balance] and since the customer has access to this status information [point balance], it is inherent that the customer can be provided with access to any of the information stored in the system.

Final Office Action, at page 9.

This statement, however, ignores a fundamental concept behind *Finsterwald*. Customers should not be able to access the unique codes maintained in the *Finsterwald* system. To permit customers this access would destroy the security of the system. A user having access to valid codes could use those codes to request points, whether or not the user ever received those codes as a result of any purchase. Such access would destroy the very reason for the codes of *Finsterwald*. Moreover, the *Finsterwald* system provides no mechanism to permit access to unique codes on an account by account basis, since the codes are not associated with any particular account. Thus the Examiner's proposed operation of *Finsterwald* is not supported and would destroy the operation of the *Finsterwald* system.

The Examiner continues by mischaracterizing the rebate status maintained in Appellants' claims, stating:

[T]he Examiner notes that since the Appellant's invention also uses a computer system to automatically process the rebates, it too would only maintain a rebate status for a few milliseconds, at most, while the processor completed the rebate transaction.

Final Office Action, at page 9. However, the rebate status as claimed and as described in Appellants' specification contemplates far more than a mere millisecond of information. For example, consider Figure 4 of Appellants' original filing and the associated text at page 14, lines 17-24. As noted previously, this text describes the nature of a rebate status in a particular embodiment, stating:

Rebate status provides an indication of the current state of a rebate request from consumer 22, for example, transaction initiated, awaiting rebate request form 24, processing information, awaiting verification, rebate request form 24 invalid, request denied, request approved, awaiting disbursement option 66

selection, fulfilling disbursement option 66, processing complete, or any other suitable status designation.

This rebate status is a far cry from a point account or a database of codes.

Therefore, the Examiner's response simply highlights deficiencies of *Finsterwald* with respect to the rebate status aspects of the claims.

No Teaching of Promotion Reports

The Examiner admits that *Finsterwald* fails to disclose the claimed aspects of generating promotion reports for sponsors. *Final Office Action*, at page 4. As teaching for the promotion reporting aspects, the Examiner cites to *Freeman*, at column 11, lines 16-20, which recites:

Records of electronic money rebate payments to users may be maintained in a database for a time period for the purpose of permitting audits of the payment data by the manufacturers or other party that is paying for the rebates.

However, simply maintaining payment records for potential audits does not show the processor of Claim 8, operable "to generate promotion reports, a promotion report comprising selected promotion information for at least one of the promotions having a particular promotion sponsor identifier."

This deficiency of *Freeman* is highlighted even more noticeably in the Examiner's attempt to show the elements of dependent Claim 13, which recites:

13. The apparatus of Claim 8, further comprising an interface operable to communicate one of the promotion reports to a promotion sponsor, the communicated promotion report comprising a number of rebate requests and a breakage rate for each promotion associated with the promotion sponsor.

In addressing this claim, the Examiner states:

Freeman further discloses the promotion reports includes [sic] all pertinent information about the rebate program, such as number of rebates, breakage rate, name and addresses or requestors, etc. (col 11, lines 16-29).

Office Action, at page 4 (underline in original). However, an examination of the cited language reveals no mention of "pertinent information about the rebate program, such as

number of rebates, breakage rate, name and addresses or requestors, etc.” *Freeman's* disclosure of payment records and associated reconciliation efforts simply does not teach promotion reports as claimed in Claims 8 or 13.

***The Examiner's Response Again
Highlights the Deficiencies of Finsterwald***

The Examiner's response to the preceding arguments again highlight the deficiencies of *Finsterwald*. The Examiner begins this response by stating:

The Applicant [sic] argues that Finsterwald does not disclose generating promotion reports for sponsors (pages 13-14).

Final Office Action, at page 10 (underline in original). However, this “argument” is merely Appellants' restatement of the Examiner's position. The Examiner articulates this position in both the office action of October 3, 2003, and the Final Office Action, which each state:

Finsterwald does not explicitly disclose generating promotion reports for sponsors.

Final Office Action, at page 4; *Office Action of October 3, 2003*, at page 3 (underline in original). To rebut his own “argument,” the Examiner points to data that may be collected by the *Finsterwald* system. However, the collection of data does not teach, either expressly or inherently, the promotion report capabilities required by the claims. Therefore, the Examiner's response again highlights deficiencies of *Finsterwald* with respect to the claims.

Claims 1, 20, 40 And 43 And Dependents

Independent Claims 1, 20, 40 and 43 include limitations that, for substantially the same reasons as discussed with respect to Claim 8, are not shown by the cited references. The claims depending from these independent claims add further patentable limitations. Moreover, the Examiner has failed to address specific aspects of Claims 40 and 43. For example, the second memory of Claim 40 is operable to store transaction information that, for a particular product purchase, includes:

a rebate transaction identifier assigned in response to a request for a rebate received from the consumer [and] rebate request information indicating a rebate request materials submission date

However, the Examiner fails to address these limitations. Appellants respectfully submit that these and other elements of these claims provide patentable distinctions with respect to the *Finsterwald-Freeman* combination.

B. The Combination Of Finsterwald And Freeman Is Improper.

There is no motivation in the cited references or in the knowledge available to one of skill in the art to combine *Finsterwald* and *Freeman*. As noted above, the cited portions of *Freeman* deal with maintaining payment records for potential audits. In contrast, *Finsterwald* discloses a point collecting system that does not contemplate making payments to consumers. Thus *Finsterwald* has no need for payment record-keeping and does not contemplate combination with a payment record-keeping reference.

Moreover the Examiner's statements regarding motivation focus on potential advantages of Appellants' claims to explain motivation for the combination. The Examiner states:

One would have been motivate [sic] to generate such reports for the sponsors in view of Finsterwald's disclosure that maintaining demographic and transaction histories for the customers and for generating targeted messages based on such an information. Generating reports for the sponsors of these promotional programs would enable the sponsor to ascertain the effectiveness of various types of programs and, thus, target future promotional programs even better.

Final Office Action, at page 3 (underline in original). However, as previously noted, the cited portions of *Freeman* deal with maintaining payment records for potential audits. The Examiner fails to show how maintaining these audit records can "enable the sponsor to ascertain the effectiveness of various types of programs and, thus, target future promotional programs even better." Thus while the Examiner does cite to a potential advantage of Appellants' claimed invention, the Examiner fails to show how the cited references provide this advantage. Moreover, Appellants respectfully submit that this proposed reason for the combination simply represents impermissible hindsight reconstruction.

Prior to the Final Office Action, Appellants submitted this analysis to the Examiner. In response, the Examiner makes three points in the Final Office Action. First, the Examiner argues that a common field of endeavor makes the combination obvious, stating:

In this case, both references pertain to process [sic] rebates on purchased products or services, [sic] both references further disclose tracking and storing data pertaining to the customer and the rebate. Therefore, it would have been obvious to one attempting to set up a rebate processing system to select one or more features from one reference to combine with features from the other reference.

Final Office Action, at page 11. However, generally addressing a common field of endeavor does not inherently provide a motivation to combine. Moreover, Appellants have shown that despite the fact that both references mention rebates, there is no need and certainly no motivation to add the audit record-keeping features of *Freeman* to *Finsterwald*.

Second, the Examiner argues that laws of local jurisdictions may require maintenance of financial records. However, the Examiner identifies no financial records of *Finsterwald* to maintain, nor does the Examiner identify any actual laws that may have such a requirement.

Third, the Examiner argues that, even without any such legal requirements, *Finsterwald* would have had other motivations, such as audits and tax filings, to maintain financial records. Again, however, the Examiner identifies no financial records of *Finsterwald* to maintain.

Appellants have thus shown that there is no motivation to combine the references, and that the proposed combination of the references is improper.

Appellants Request Allowance Of Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-31, and 40-46

For at least the reasons discussed above, Appellants respectfully submit that the proposed *Finsterwald-Freeman* combination is improper and, even if considered for arguments sake, fails to teach or suggest all elements of Appellants' Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-31, and 40-46. Therefore, Appellants respectfully request the Board to direct the Examiner to allow these claims.

Group 2

For at least three reasons, Appellants respectfully request that the Board reverse the Examiner's findings of obviousness with respect to Claims 32 and 34-38 and direct the Examiner to allow these claims. First, the Examiner has completely failed to present any evidence of obviousness and has thus failed to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness.

Second, assuming for arguments sake that the Examiner had established a *prima facie* case of obviousness, the *Finsterwald-Freeman* combination fails to teach or suggest all elements of Claims 32 and 34-38. Third, once again assuming for arguments sake that the Examiner had established a *prima facie* case of obviousness, the combination of *Finsterwald* and *Freeman* is improper.

A. The Examiner Fails To Address Claim 32 and Thus Fails to Establish a Prima Facie Case of Obviousness.

Claim 32 recites an interface for facilitating rebate processing that includes a number of limitations different than the other independent claims, and the Examiner has failed to address these elements. The Examiner has thus not established a *prima facie* case of obviousness. "To reject claims in an application under section 103, an examiner must show an un rebutted *prima facie* case of obviousness. In the absence of a proper *prima facie* case of obviousness, an applicant who complies with the other statutory requirements is entitled to a patent. On appeal to the Board, an applicant can overcome a rejection by showing insufficient evidence of *prima facie* obviousness" *In re Rouffet*, 149 F.3d 1350, 1355 (Fed. Cir. 1998). By failing to provide any evidence of the obviousness of selected limitations of Claim 32, the Examiner has certainly failed to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness. Therefore, Appellants respectfully request the Board to direct the Examiner to allow Claim 32 and its dependent Claims 34-38.

B. The Finsterwald-Freeman Combination Fails To Teach Or Suggest All Elements of Claims 32 and 34-38.

Claim 32 recites:

32. A computer-based interface for facilitating rebate processing, the interface operable to:

display a plurality of fields for entry by a user to create a promotion for a product bearing a rebate;

receive promotion information for the promotion, the promotion information comprising a product identifier and a plurality of disbursement options for receiving an authorized rebate, at least one of the disbursement options having a cash value to a recipient different than another one of the disbursement options;

communicate promotion information to a remote rebate processing center; and
receive a status of the promotion based on purchases of the product, the status indicating a number of rebate requests for the promotion and a number of authorized rebates fulfilled for each of the disbursement options for the promotion.

This claim includes a number of limitations not taught or suggested by the cited references. For example, the interface of Claim 32 is operable to “display a plurality of fields for entry by a user to create a promotion for a product bearing a rebate.” Not only does the Examiner completely fail to address this element, but the cited references fail to teach or suggest it. Also, Claim 32 includes limitations that, for reasons substantially similar to those presented above, are not taught or suggested by the *Finsterwald-Freeman* combination. Therefore, Appellants respectfully request the Board to direct the Examiner to allow Claim 32 and its dependent Claims 34-38.

C. The Combination Of Finsterwald And Freeman Is Improper.

For the reasons discussed above with respect to Group 1, Appellants respectfully submit that the proposed *Finsterwald-Freeman* combination is improper. Thus because the proposed combination is improper, Appellants also request the Board to direct the Examiner to allow Claim 32 and its dependent Claims 34-38.

CONCLUSION

Appellants have demonstrated that the present invention, as claimed in Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-32, 34-38, and 40-46, is patentably distinct from the cited prior art. Accordingly, Appellants respectfully request that the Board reverse the final rejection of the Examiner and instruct the Examiner to issue a Notice of Allowance of Claims 1, 2, 4-14, 16-26, 28-32, 34-38, and 40-46 as last amended.

Appellants enclose a check in the amount of \$165.00 to cover the fee for this Appeal Brief. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any extra fees or credit any overpayments to Deposit Account No. 02-0384 of Baker Botts L.L.P.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX-CLAIMS PRESENTED ON APPEAL

1. (Previously Presented) A system for rebate processing, comprising:
 - a plurality of first devices associated with promotion sponsors, the first devices operable to communicate information describing promotions to a rebate processing center;
 - a plurality of second devices associated with consumers, the second devices operable to communicate information indicating purchases of products to the rebate processing center;
 - and
 - the rebate processing center, comprising:
 - a first memory operable to store promotion information describing the promotions available for the purchases, the promotion information comprising, for each of the promotions, a promotion sponsor identifier indicating a selected one of the promotion sponsors, a promotion identifier, promotion requirements, and at least one disbursement option;
 - a second memory operable to store transaction information indicating the purchases of the products, the transaction information comprising, for each of the purchases, a consumer identifier, a rebate request status, and a promotion identifier matching to a selected one of the promotions; and
 - a processor operable to process rebate requests by associating the purchases with the promotions using the promotion identifiers and determining whether selected transaction information for the purchases satisfies the rebate requirements for the promotions, the processor further operable to provide rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses and to generate promotion reports, a promotion report comprising selected promotion information for at least one of the promotions having a particular promotion sponsor identifier.
2. (Previously Presented) The system of Claim 1, wherein the promotion information comprises, for at least one of the promotions, a plurality of disbursement options for receiving an authorized rebate, at least one of the plurality of disbursement options having a cash value to a recipient different than another one of the plurality of disbursement options.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Original) The system of Claim 1, wherein the second devices are further operable to output a rebate request form in a format suitable for mailing.

5. (Previously Presented) The system of Claim 1, wherein at least one first device is operable to receive one of the promotion reports, the received promotion report comprising a number of rebate requests and a breakage rate for each promotion associated with a promotion sponsor.

6. (Previously Presented) The system of Claim 1, wherein at least one second device is operable to receive one of the rebate status updates from the rebate processing center, the received rebate status update indicating the rebate request status for rebate requests submitted to the rebate processing center by a user of the second device.

7. (Original) The system of Claim 1, wherein at least one second device is operable to receive an authorization upon approval of a rebate request, the authorization having a plurality of selectable disbursement options.

8. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for rebate processing, comprising:
a first memory operable to store promotion information describing a plurality of promotions, the promotion information comprising, for each of the promotions, a promotion sponsor identifier, a promotion identifier, promotion requirements, and at least one disbursement option;

a second memory operable to store transaction information indicating a plurality of product purchases, the transaction information comprising, for each of the purchases, a consumer identifier, a rebate request status, and a promotion identifier matching to a selected one of the promotions; and

a processor operable to process rebate requests by associating the product purchases with the promotions using the promotion identifiers and determining whether selected transaction information for the purchases satisfies the rebate requirements for the promotions, the processor further operable to provide rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses and to generate promotion reports, a promotion report comprising selected promotion information for at least one of the promotions having a particular promotion sponsor identifier.

9. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 8, further comprising an interface operable:
to receive promotion information from a plurality of promotion sponsors describing the promotions;

to receive transaction information from a plurality of consumers indicating the product purchases.

10. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein the interface is operable to receive information electronically using the Internet.

11. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein the interface is operable to receive transaction information entered from a rebate request form mailed by a purchaser of a product.

12. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 8, further comprising an interface operable to communicate one of the promotion reports to a promotion sponsor in response to a request from the promotion sponsor.

13. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 8, further comprising an interface operable to communicate one of the promotion reports to a promotion sponsor, the communicated promotion report comprising a number of rebate requests and a breakage rate for each promotion associated with the promotion sponsor.

14. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 8, further comprising an interface to communicate an authorization to a consumer upon approving a rebate request, the authorization having a plurality of selectable disbursement options.

15. (Canceled)

16. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 8, wherein at least one promotion comprises a plurality of disbursement options for receiving an authorized rebate, at least one of the plurality of disbursement options having a cash value to a recipient different than another one of the plurality of disbursement options.

17. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 16, wherein the disbursement options comprise a cash rebate and a credit voucher.

18. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 16, wherein at least one promotion comprises:

- a product identifier;
- an end date for the promotion; and
- a geographic target for the promotion.

19. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 8, wherein at least one transaction comprises:

personal information of the purchaser of the product; and
purchase information.

20. (Previously Presented) A method for rebate processing, comprising:
storing promotion information describing a plurality of promotions, the promotion information comprising, for each of the promotions, a promotion sponsor identifier, a promotion identifier, promotion requirements, and at least one disbursement option;

storing transaction information indicating a plurality of product purchases, the transaction information comprising, for each of the purchases, a consumer identifier indicating one of the consumers and a promotion identifier matching to a selected one of the promotions;

processing rebate requests by associating the product purchases with the promotions using the promotion identifiers, wherein processing a rebate request for a selected one of the purchases comprises determining whether transaction information for the selected purchase satisfies the rebate requirements for the promotion indicated by the promotion identifier for the selected purchase;

providing rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses; and

generate promotion reports, a promotion report comprising selected promotion information for at least one of the promotions having a particular promotion sponsor identifier.

21. (Original) The method of Claim 20, further comprising:

receiving, from a plurality of promotion sponsors, promotion information describing the promotions; and

receiving, from a plurality of consumers, transaction information indicating the product purchases.

22. (Original) The method of Claim 21, wherein the steps of receiving are performed electronically using the Internet.

23. (Original) The method of Claim 21, further comprising the step of receiving transaction information entered from a rebate request form mailed by a purchaser of a product.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 21, further comprising:
receiving a request from a promotion sponsor for a status of promotions associated with the promotion sponsor;
determining a promotion sponsor identifier for the promotion sponsor;
generating a promotion report for at least one of the promotions associated with the determined promotion sponsor identifier; and
communicating the generated promotion report to the promotion sponsor.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 24, wherein the generated promotion report comprises a number of rebate requests and a breakage rate for each promotion associated with the promotion sponsor.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 20, further comprising:
approving a rebate request;
communicating an authorization to a consumer upon approving the rebate request, the authorization having a plurality of disbursement options; and
receiving a selection of the disbursement options.

27. (Canceled)

28. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 20, wherein at least one promotion comprises a plurality of disbursement options for receiving an authorized rebate, at least one of the plurality of disbursement options having a cash value to a recipient different than another one of the plurality of disbursement options.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 28, wherein the disbursement options comprise a cash rebate and a credit voucher.

30. (Original) The method of Claim 20, wherein at least one promotion comprises:

- a product identifier;
- an end date for the promotion; and
- a geographic target for the promotion.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 20, wherein at least one transaction comprises:

- personal information of the purchaser of the product; and
- purchase information.

32. (Previously Presented) A computer-based interface for facilitating rebate processing, the interface operable to:

display a plurality of fields for entry by a user to create a promotion for a product bearing a rebate;

receive promotion information for the promotion, the promotion information comprising a product identifier and a plurality of disbursement options for receiving an authorized rebate, at least one of the disbursement options having a cash value to a recipient different than another one of the disbursement options;

communicate promotion information to a remote rebate processing center; and

receive a status of the promotion based on purchases of the product, the status indicating a number of rebate requests for the promotion and a number of authorized rebates fulfilled for each of the disbursement options for the promotion.

33. (Canceled)

34. (Previously presented) The computer-based interface of Claim 32, wherein the disbursement options comprise a cash rebate and a credit voucher.

35. (Original) The computer-based interface of Claim 32, wherein promotion information comprises:

a product identifier;

an end date for the promotion; and

a geographic target for the promotion.

36. (Original) The computer-based interface of Claim 32, wherein the interface is operable to receive and communicate promotion information repeatedly to create a plurality of promotions for the remote rebate processing center.

37. (Original) The computer-based interface of Claim 32, wherein the interface is web-based and is further operable to communicate promotion information and receive a status of the promotion electronically using the Internet.

38. (Original) The computer-based interface of Claim 32, wherein the status of the promotion comprises:

a number of rebate requests; and
a breakage rate.

39. (Canceled)

40. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for rebate processing, comprising:

a first memory operable to store promotion information describing a plurality of promotions, the promotion information comprising, for each of the promotions, a promotion sponsor identifier, a promotion identifier, a product identifier, at least one disbursement option, promotion status information comprising a total number of rebate requests and a breakage rate for the promotion, and a plurality of promotion requirements;

a second memory operable to store transaction information indicating a plurality of product purchases, the transaction information comprising, for each of the product purchases, product purchase information indicating a purchase date, consumer information for a consumer associated with the purchase, a rebate transaction identifier assigned in response to a request for a rebate received from the consumer, a rebate request status detailing current status of the request for the rebate, rebate request information indicating a rebate request materials submission date, and a promotion identifier matching to a selected one of the promotions; and

a processor operable to process rebate requests by associating the product purchases with the promotions using the promotion identifiers and determining whether selected transaction information for the purchases satisfies the promotion requirements for the promotions by verifying that the product purchase information and the rebate request information satisfy the promotion requirements, the processor further operable to provide rebate status updates to the consumers using the rebate request statuses and to generate promotion reports, a promotion report comprising selected promotion information for at least one of the promotions having a particular promotion sponsor identifier, the promotion report comprising the number of rebate requests and the breakage rate for each promotion.

41. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 40, further comprising an interface operable to communicate an authorization to a consumer upon approving a rebate request, the authorization having a plurality of selectable disbursement options.

42. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 40, wherein at least one promotion comprises a plurality of disbursement options for receiving an authorized rebate, at least one of the plurality of disbursement options having a cash value to a recipient different than another one of the plurality of disbursement options.

43. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for rebate processing, comprising:

a first memory operable to store promotion information describing a plurality of promotions, the promotion information comprising, for each of the promotions, a promotion sponsor identifier, a promotion identifier, a product identifier, at least one disbursement option, and promotion requirements comprising a purchase date range, required materials, and a date requirement for submitting the required materials;

a second memory operable to store transaction information indicating a plurality of product purchases, the transaction information comprising, for each of the product purchases, product purchase information indicating a purchase date, consumer information for a consumer associated with the purchase, a rebate request status detailing current status of the request for the rebate, rebate request information indicating a required materials submission date, and a promotion identifier matching to a selected one of the promotions; and

a processor operable to process rebate requests by associating the product purchases with the promotions using the promotion identifiers and determining whether selected transaction information for the purchases satisfies the promotion requirements for the promotions, wherein determining whether the selected transaction information for the purchases satisfies the promotion requirements for the promotions comprises verifying that the purchase dates fall within the corresponding purchase date ranges, that the required materials have been submitted, and that the required materials submission dates satisfy the corresponding date requirements.

44. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 43, wherein the promotion requirements further comprise at least one of a retailer requirement and a geographic zone.

45. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 43, wherein the required materials comprise a proof of purchase.

46. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 43, wherein the second memory is further operable, for each of the product purchases, to maintain a rebate transaction identifier assigned in response to an initial request for a rebate received from the consumer, and wherein the required materials comprise a rebate request form indicating the rebate transaction identifier.